



New Jersey Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools

Career and Technical Education Programs NJAC 6A:19

Testimony Before NJ State Board of Education

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Good afternoon. I am Dr. Kimberly Schneider, Superintendent of the Mercer County Technical Schools. I am also a member of the NJ Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools Executive Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the proposed readoption of rules governing career and technical education in New Jersey.

The code proposed by the State Board of Education last month contains many positive changes that will strengthen career and technical education. The New Jersey Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools strongly supports these changes and we thank the State Board and Department of Education for the careful attention you have given to this code. In particular, Rochelle Hendricks and her staff and Jay Doolan worked closely with the Council to address our concerns and ensure that the regulations support the continued strength of county vocational-technical school programs.

Most notably, the proposed rules strengthen existing provisions regarding access to county vocational-technical school programs (NJAC 6A:19-2.3). Over the years, numerous legal cases have challenged students' statutory right to attend county vocational school programs. Though each decision has reaffirmed this right, expensive and divisive legal challenges continue to proliferate. The clear statement in code that existence of a similar program in the local school district does not negate a student's right to enroll in the county vocational school clarifies the statute and will eliminate confusion and misinterpretation of the law.

Another important improvement is the creation of a coherent section of code to deal with county vocational-technical schools (NJAC 6A:19-2.2). Previously, provisions specific to county vocational-technical schools were scattered throughout the code, which was cumbersome and confusing. Addressing county vocational schools in a coherent manner recognizes our distinct governance and operational structure as well as our statutory mission as the state's primary delivery system for career and technical education.

The proposed rules will substantially increase accountability for career and technical education, enabling the Department of Education to meet its stated goal of targeting limited resources to high quality programs. For the first time, it establishes in code the requirements for programs to gain state approval. The Council has consistently supported a rigorous program approval process as essential to providing accountability for federal funds and ensuring students, parents, and employers of quality programs that prepare individuals for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

Going forward, the Council hopes to work with the Department of Education on implementation of a process for county vocational-technical schools that recognizes our strong track record and permits approval for a range of career and technical education programs within each of the 16 career clusters. This will provide appropriate oversight without burdensome bureaucracy, and it is consistent with language in the current code that gives the county board of vocational-technical education the authority to determine which secondary and postsecondary programs are needed (NJAC 6A:19-3.4c current; NJAC 6A:19-2.2 proposed).

The Council supports proposed changes in the code to clarify the requirements for training of individuals who will coordinate Structured Learning Experiences within school districts. When the State Board initially adopted these requirements as part of the Licensure Code, you took action to reduce the amount of training for structured learning experience coordinators to "a minimum of 20 hours of training or a Department-approved equivalent program in safety and health and required Department procedures and planning for SLEs" as well as training in child wage and labor laws as required by the state and federal departments of Labor. The Council has repeatedly expressed concerns about the training programs being offered to school districts, because they go well

beyond these requirements to encompass 48 hours of training. The Council will be seeking approval for our own "equivalent program" that emphasizes content over seat time, but we urge the State Board of Education to keep a close eye on this issue.

We thank the Department and State Board for revising the proposed code to clarify that the training requirements apply to "structured learning experience coordinators" who must be designated by each district review SLEs for safety and educational integrity, not to every teacher that places a student in a structured learning experience.

Among the most important aspects of the proposed code is what is not included. The Council commends the Department staff for eliminating a great deal of unnecessary language that has been perpetuated in the code for many years.

The proposed rules provide a sound regulatory structure for the delivery of career and technical education programs in New Jersey. These rules must be administered in concert with a new State Plan, which will provide an opportunity to strengthen the role of career and technical education in New Jersey. In addition, proposals to revise the state's high school graduation requirements and student assessments and legislation to restructure school funding and reauthorize school construction will be critical issues for our county vocational-technical schools. The Council appreciates the State Board's ongoing support and we look forward to continuing to work with you on these issues to ensure quality career and technical education opportunities for students throughout New Jersey. Thank you.